

# *Documents on Diplomacy: The Source*

## *"Slavery must go South"*

*Senator Albert Gallatin Brown Hazelhurst, Mississippi September 11, 1858*

**NOTE:** Senator Albert Gallatin Brown was an influential Mississippi politician, who served first as Governor and then as United States Senator. Brown began his speech with a length summation of the on-going debate over the extension of slavery into Kansas, which is here omitted. When we join the speech, Senator Brown is discussing the exploits of William Walker, an American who wanted to found an English-speaking colony in Nicaragua. He seized the presidency, but was later defeated and executed.

I never doubted that Mr. Buchanan was right on the Nicaragua question on the start, and I have just as little doubt that he is all wrong now. That Walker had the sympathy of the President when he set out for Central America, I think is certain; that he ought to have retained it is just as certain. I am not saying that Walker is the man of destiny his friends have claimed him to be. I think he is not. I do not say he is the most proper man to conduct an expedition such as he set on foot. It is very likely he is not. But he was doing us a good service, and he ought to have been let alone. Under his lead, before this, Nicaragua would have been a thriving and prosperous state out of the Union. But in an evil hour the President listened to evil councils, and Walker's expedition was broken up, and himself brought back a prisoner of state. I expressed myself pretty freely about this transaction at the time, and I shall not now repeat what I said then; but there is a branch of the subject to which I want to call your special attention.

About the time Walker was fitting out his expedition, and while he felt very certain, if he did not violate the laws, he would not be molested, the Secretary of State [Lewis Cass] entered into a treaty with a Mr. Irissari [A Nicaraguan government official], the stipulations of which I assume, for I do not pretend in this connection to have seen the treaty, were inconsistent with any continued sympathy or countenance to Walker on the part of the government.

This brings me to consider, first, what interest we had in the Nicaragua question; and next, which plan, the Walker plan or the Cass-Irissari plan, is most likely to sub-serve our purposes. First, I assume that we are directly interested, and to a deep extent, in planting a slave holding state in Nicaragua. We are so, because slavery must go South, if it goes at all. If Walker had been allowed to succeed, he would have planted such a state, and the Southern States would have populated it. It is against our interest to have an anti-slave state planted in our front. We all know that such a state must, sooner or later, come into the Union, and help to swell that hostile power at the North which has already given us so much

trouble. And that being in our front, it will stand ready at all times to arrest our progress. The plan for colonizing Central America, as foreshadowed in the Cass-Irissari treaty, is through the agency of the American Transit Company. That company has its headquarters in Wall street and State street. If Central America is ever colonized through its agency, it will, at the same time, be abolitionized. Of this I have no doubt. I was for Walker, because I thought he was giving us a slave-holding state. I was against Cass and Irissari, because they were giving us an Abolition state.

It may seem strange to you that I thus talk of taking possession of Central America, or any part of it, seeing, as you suppose you do, that it belongs to someone else. Yes, it belonged to someone else, just as this country once belonged to the Choctaws. When we wanted this country we came and took it. If we want Central America, or any part of it, I would go and take that. If the inhabitants were willing to live under a good government, such as we would give them, I would have them protected; and if they were not, they might go somewhere else. I suppose sentiments like these will startle all foggy-dom, and I shall be set down as a regular fire-eating filibuster. Very well; I have heard people whine over the white man's cruelty to Indians before, but American statesmen did not heed it, and the result is that stately mansions have taken the place of Indian wigwams, and railroads have obliterated the Indian war-path. It is said, I know, that these Central American semi-barbarians, conglomerate of Indian, Negro, and Celt, have been recognized by some of the powers of Europe as independent states. Well, suppose they have. Would not the same powers have recognized the Choctaws, Chickasaws, and every other Indian tribe, as independent, if our government had not interposed to prevent it? We have treaties ourselves with the Central American States. So we have with the Indian tribes. But these treaties, no odds how worded, have never stood in the way of our taking their land when the expansion of our people and the spread of civilization required us to have it. No, no; this is all fudge and fustian, signifying nothing. If we want Central America, the cheapest, easiest, and quickest way to get it is to go and take it, and if France and England interfere, read the Monroe doctrine to them. If any one desires to know why I want a foothold in Central America, I avow frankly it is because I want to plant slavery there; I think slavery is a good thing *per se*; I believe it to be a great moral, social, and political blessing—a blessing to the master and a blessing to the slave, and I believe, moreover, that it is of Divine

origin. I said so in the House of Representatives at Washington, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January, 1850, and I say so now—I said so then, because I thought so then—I say so now, because I think so yet.

That slavery is a blessing to the master, is shown by simply contrasting a southern gentleman with a northern abolitionist. One is courageous, high-bred, and manly. The other is cowardly, low flung, and sneaking. The slave is blessed with a sound health, a sleek skin, and Christian instruction—the free African is dwarfed by disease, scrofulous from hunger, and is a barbarian and a cannibal. That it is of divine origin is proven by the Bible; in no line of that blessed book is slavery reprobated; in many places it is directly sanctioned. The angel of the Lord, we are told, captured Hagar and took her home to her mistress. Onesimus was a fugitive when captured by Paul, and though slavery existed in the time of the Saviour, neither he nor the disciples preached against it. What God has ordained, cannot be wrong. What Omnipotence sustains, fanaticism cannot throw down. But to the point.

I want a footing in Central America for other reasons, or rather for a continuation of the reasons already given. I want Cuba, and I know that sooner or later we must have it. If the worm-eaten throne of Spain is willing to give it up for a fair equivalent, well—if not, we must take it. I want Tamaulipas, Potosi, and one or two other Mexican States; and I want them all for the same reason—for the planting or spreading of slavery. And a footing in Central America will powerfully aid us in acquiring those other states. It will render them less valuable to the other powers of the earth, and thereby diminish competition with us. Yes, I want these countries for the spread of slavery. I would spread the blessings of slavery, like the religion of our Divine Master, to the uttermost ends of the earth, and rebellious and wicked as the Yankees have been, I would even extend it to them. I would not force it upon them, as I would not force religion upon them, but I would preach it to them, as I would preach the gospel. They are a stiff-necked and rebellious race, and I have little hope that they will receive the blessing, and I would therefore prepare for its spread to other more favored lands. I may be asked if I am in favor of reopening the African slave-trade. Not yet. I think it not practicable; and as yet it would not be wise, if it were practicable. We can never reopen that trade while the Union lasts, unless we can multiply the number of slave-holding states. This we can never do, unless we acquire more territory. Whether we can obtain the territory while the Union lasts, I do not know; I fear we cannot. But I would make an honest effort, and if we failed, I would go out of the Union and try it there. I speak plainly. I would make a refusal to acquire territory because it was to be slave territory, a cause for disunion, just as I would make the refusal to admit a new state because it was to be a slave state, a cause for disunion.

I have said it would not be wise, if it were practicable, to reopen the slave-trade now. The South wants a large white population, and this she wants worse than she does cheap slave labor. I doubt

the economy of cheap labor in the cotton states, under the present organization of society. Its first effect would be to check white immigration, and to drive away a valuable and reliable part of our present population. With a greater expansion of territory and wider fields for the great staples, sugar and tobacco, as well as cotton, to say nothing of fruits and vegetables, we should need an importation of black laborers; and in that case I should be willing to take them from Africa. At present their introduction here would reduce our white population, and thus diminish our chances for acquiring Central America, Cuba, and the northern states of Mexico. If we mean to increase our white population, and thereby our weight in the Union, or if we mean to retain our present population and thereby retain our present weight, the way to do it is to keep up the wages of labor. This cannot be done by the introduction of cheap laborers.

It is clear to my mind that if we have more land than laborers, then we ought not to acquire any more territory, at least for the present, and therefore the acquisition of Cuba, the colonization of Central America, and all kindred questions, must be postponed. If, on the other hand, labor is trenching, is close upon the lands—I mean lands worth cultivating—then we ought to get more land before we get more labor, since labor without land will be a burden rather than a profit.

I do not know that I understand the purpose of those who are urging this question of reopening the slave-trade. If it be to agitate the public mind and still further prepare it for disunion, then I can only say to those engaged in it, they are defeating their own object. The South was never so near united as now. The introduction of this question will sow the seeds of discord, and create wide-spread divisions where there is now almost perfect harmony.

Of the constitutional power of Congress to repeal the laws prohibiting the slave-trade, there can be no question. The language of the Constitution is permissive, not mandatory. Congress shall not prohibit the introduction of African slaves prior to 1808, says the Constitution, thereby implying that it may, not that it shall, do it after that time. In the exercise of the power, Congress went out of its way to denounce the traffic as piracy. This was a gratuitous affront to the South. It implied that the trade was inherently wrong, and involved the highest degree of moral turpitude. No such thing is true. If it be piracy to traffic in slaves between the coast of Africa and the United States, it will be difficult to show that it is anything less to carry on the trade between Virginia and Mississippi. It is piracy simply because the law so denounces it; there is in it no inherent moral guilt.

This denunciation of the slave-trade as piracy has involved us in a long series of international disputes with Great Britain, which, thanks to the wisdom and moderation of Mr. Buchanan's administration, has just now been settled. Great Britain has not relinquished the right of search, as some people have supposed. She had no such right to relinquish. But she has done at last what she ought to have done at first; she has said that, inasmuch as the



laws—her own as well as ours—denounce the African slave-trade as piracy, she will search suspected vessels; if they turn out to be slavers, it is well—nobody will complain; if otherwise, she will make instant and ample reparation. The objection to this, if objection there be, will be found in the law, and not in the course which Great Britain means in the future to pursue. Pirates are the enemies of the whole human family, and all mankind are authorized, without special warrant, to destroy them. If, however, in pursuing pirates, innocent and un-offending parties are molested, the offenders must pay damages. Any one of you may pursue a thief or a murderer, and arrest him without a warrant. If you get the right man, it is well: the law will not only sustain but applaud you. But if you get the wrong man, it is bad: the law not only withdraws its countenance, but mulcts you in damages.

If the slave-trade is to be regarded as piracy, Great Britain's present position is right. If it is not, then the law which so denounces it ought to be repealed.

I should be glad, if time permitted, to discuss the question of slavery in its local aspects, and show how it elevates the white man. How, instead of degrading the non-slaveholder in the social scale, as has been asserted, it elevates him; and how, instead of reducing the wages of his labor, it increases them. I should be glad to show how it is that in all non-slaveholding communities capital competes directly with labor, and why it is that exactly the reverse is true in all communities where slavery exists. But all this I must reserve for some other occasion.

I have been asked to state my views as to the future of the Union, and I will do so with the utmost freedom and frankness. In twenty years I have not changed my opinion as to the great fact, that you must give up the Union, or give up slavery. That they can and ought to exist together in harmony, and be, as they have been, mutually beneficial, is certainly true; but that they will not, is, in my judgment, just as true. The sentiment of hostility to the South and its institutions, is widening and deepening at the North every day. Those who tell you otherwise are themselves deceived, or they wilfully deceive you. Twenty years ago, this sentiment was confined to a few fanatics; now it pervades all classes, ages, and sexes of society. It is madness to suppose that this tide is ever to roll back. To-day, Seward, the great arch spirit of Abolitionism, marshals his hosts. In twenty years he has not changed his plan. He means to bring the Union, with all its power and patronage, its prestige and its glory, into direct conflict with slavery. The day of battle cannot much longer be delayed. When it comes, when the power of the Union is turned against slavery, when its arm is raised to strike down the South, I know not where other men will stand, but for myself, I will stand where I have always stood, on the side of slavery and the South.

I was raised in awe, in almost superstitious reverence of the Union. But if the Union is to be converted into a masked battery for assailing my property and my domestic peace, I will destroy it if I can; and if this cannot be done by a direct assault, I would resort to sapping and mining. This is plain talk. I mean, that you should

understand me, and that others shall know where I stand. Now, as in 1850, I do not fear the consequences of disunion. I do not court it, but I do not dread it. On the 30th of January of that year I said: "The South afraid to dissolve the Union—why should we fear? Are we not able to take care of ourselves? Shall eight millions of people, with more than one hundred millions of dollars in annual products, fear to take their position among the nations of the earth? Neither Old England or New England will make war on us—our cotton bags are our bonds of peace."

Nearly nine years have passed away, and the convictions of 1850 have been strengthened by each year's experience.

It is futile, if, indeed, it is not puerile, to attempt a compromise of the slavery question. The difference between the North and South is radical and irreconcilable. Discussion has only served to exasperate the feelings of the two sections, and every attempt to adjust their differ ends by congressional compromise, has but widened the breach between them. In a much-abused speech, pronounced by me at Elwood Springs, near Port Gibson, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, 1850, I said: "We are told that our difficulties are at an end; that, unjust as we all know the action of Congress to have been, it is better to submit, and especially is it better since this is to be the end of the slavery agitation. If this were the end, fellow citizens, I might debate the question as to whether it would not be the better policy, such is my love of peace, such my almost superstitious reverence for the Union, that might be willing to submit if this was to be the end of our troubles. But I know it is not to be the end.

"Look to the success of the Free-Soilers in the late elections. Listen to the notes of preparation everywhere in the Northern States, and tell me if men do not wilfully deceive you when they say that the slavery agitation is over. I tell you, fellow citizens, it is not over."

I then predicted that the compromise would be observed just so long as it suited the purposes of the North to observe it, and no longer. Whether that prediction has been verified, I leave to the decision of all men of all parties.

What is there in the future to encourage the South? The enemy is growing stronger every day, that is true. But thanks to the good sense of our people, we are becoming more united. The day is not far distant when we will stand in the breach as one man, determined to do or die in defence of our common heritage. Never within my recollection has the South stood so closely united; and seeing this, I feel encouraged. Still, I would now, as in 1850, give Cromwell's advice to his army: "Pray to the Lord, but keep your powder dry."

I have undiminished confidence in the soundness of Democratic theories; and I believe now, as I have always believed, that the Democratic party is the only national party on which the country can rely. Indeed, since the disruption of the old Whig party,

it is the only one which has a decent claim to nationality. But I will not so far stultify myself as to say that all who claim to be National Democrats are worthy of confidence. I utterly repudiate the men of seven principles—the five loaves and two fishes men—the men who expect a great deal of bread for very little Democracy. I will fellowship with no such Swiss guard. They will be at Charleston, and if they carry the day, it will be time for honest men to retire. It is expected of us, I suppose, that we are to go into the convention at Charleston for a presidential candidate for 1860. I am not over hopeful of good results following from that convention, and yet I am willing to go in and try what can be done. That we should get a sound platform and sound candidates, I do not question. That we shall elect our candidate is probable—that we shall sustain him after he is elected, is not probable. National Democracy has not the cohesive power it had in the days of Jackson, else General Pierce would not have been sacrificed at the North for doing his duty, and Mr. Buchanan would not now be abandoned for standing square on the platform of his party. Still, so long as they give us sound platforms and sound candidates upon them, I do not see what better we can do than meet them in national convention.

A few partial friends have connected my humble name with the presidency; I thank them for their kindness, but I am not deceived as to my true position. No man entertaining the sentiments I have

expressed today, can be elected President of the United States. I never doubted that a camel might go through the eye of a needle, but I am wholly incredulous as to any man who entertains sound views on the subject of Southern rights, ever being crowded into the presidential chair. He may entertain sound views, and keep them to himself, or he may so disguise them in general verbiage, as to make them palatable. But, if his views are sound, and he expresses them with the boldness of a freeman, and the independence of a man, he seals his prospects for ever.

No, no; I have no silly aspirations for the presidency, and, therefore, have no occasion to suspect that my judgment has been warped by ambition—I am ambitious, but my ambition does not lead me towards the presidency. That is the road to apostasy; I would rather be the independent senator that I am, and speak for Mississippi, than be president, and be subject to the call of every demagogue, and compelled to speak for a heterogeneous mass, with as many opinions as the rainbow has hues. Whenever the South can no longer rely on the National Democracy, and feels that the time has come for her to go it alone, I will stand for her, if she can find no son more worthy of her confidence. But I will never consent to compromise my principles, or flatter FreeSoilers for their votes. When it comes to that,—I stand out. ■

*Source*

*Speeches, Messages and other writing of the Hon. Albert G. Brown,*  
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